



Mercy Drops

Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103).

I was a senior in high school, focused and driven. A Mozart French horn solo was all that seemed to matter. I will never forget the phone call with the news that I had won first prize in the northern Wisconsin regional brass competition. It was a feeling of sheer ecstasy—a landmark in my life.

We all have experiences like that. Maybe it's that long-awaited phone call that the adoption has finally come through. There are no words to describe our joy. Or maybe we're biting our nails in the third row back of the darkened auditorium when daughter Katie spells "masseuse" and wins the spelling bee.

Or, perhaps we've traveled more than a hundred miles to cheer the hometown team on and son Mike makes the final basket to win the state championship.

These are landmarks in our lives and we ought to treasure those singular moments. We glue the letters and certificates and newspaper stories in our scrapbooks.

These are the big stories that are easily featured. But do we sometimes ignore the little *tender mercies* that surround us every day?

Counselors warn us that we shouldn't depend on these highpoints of life to carry us through. One obvious reason is because they come so infrequently, and besides no one can live on such high planes of excitement. We're simply not constructed that way psychologically.

Indeed, many people feel depressed after such singular experiences. There's a huge buildup of anticipation and then a big letdown—whether we win or lose.

Yet, we often ask God for the big gift while failing to see all the little gifts all around us. I'm reminded of the lines of an old hymn that I sang as a child: "There Shall be Showers of Blessing."

It speaks of wanting to hear the "sound of abundance of rain." The final words of the chorus are:

Mercy drops 'round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.

I think we easily set ourselves up for failure when we are pleading for showers, while ignoring the *mercy drops* that are falling all around us.

Tender mercies do not carry an "I Won the Lottery" headline. Sometimes they seem so small and trivial that we hardly notice, but they sustain us on a daily basis—if we are aware of them.

John Ames is an old-man preacher in the best-selling book *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson. He's on medication and his days are numbered—but not his memories. Some of the stories he records for his young son are landmarks, but mostly they are tender mercies:

A few days ago you and your mother came home with flowers....You had honey-suckle, and you showed me how to suck the nectar out of the blossoms.

You would bite the little tip off the flower and then hand it to me, and I pretended I didn't know how to go about it, and I would put the whole flower in my mouth and pretend to chew it and swallow it...

and you'd laugh and laugh and say, "No! No! No!"...

...and then you got serious and you said, "I want you to do this."

And then you put your hand on my cheek and touched the flower to my lips, so gently and carefully, and said, "Now sip."

You said, "You have to take your medicine."

So I did, and it tasted exactly like honeysuckle, just the way it did when I was your age and it seemed to grow on every fence post and porch railing in creation.

What a profound story of tender mercies, yet so simple—God's *mercy drop* gift to an old man and a little boy. □

—Ruth A. Tucker

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